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## A Well-Designed Yard Can Save Water, Energy

**By Linda Cawley, IDWR Information Specialist**

Tired of a “ho-hum” yard? With a little pre-planning, you can turn your yard into a neighborhood showplace and save water and energy at the same time.

What’s the key? Xeriscaping. Pronounced zeri-scaping, xeriscaping is derived from the Greek “xeros” meaning dry, combined with landscaping.

This doesn’t mean a rock garden or the absence of lawns, flowers and shrubs. Xeriscape landscaping incorporates seven basic principles that lead to saving water: planning and design, soil analysis, practical turf area, appropriate plant selection, efficient irrigation, use of mulches, and appropriate maintenance.

Whether you are designing a yard for a new home or just updating your present landscape, consider the exposures on the site. As a general rule, south and west exposures result in the greatest water losses, especially areas near buildings or paved surfaces.

You can save water in these locations simply by selecting plants that adapt to less water. Grasses and plants that require little water can be a beautiful alternative to thirsty lawns.

Carefully positioned trees and shrubs can save up to 25 percent of a household’s energy consumption for heating and cooling, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. On average, a well-designed landscape provides enough energy savings to return your initial investment in less than eight years.

When designing your yard, check the slope in both the front and back yards. Steep slopes, especially those on the south and west exposures, waste water through runoff and rapid water evaporation. If possible, slope the lawn area slightly away from the house about 6-12 inches per 100 feet.

Next, find out what type of soil is in your yard – sandy or clay. Consult your local county extension office to get instructions for taking soil samples and obtaining soil analysis.

When selecting the type of grass for your lawn, keep in mind the intended use of your yard. Different types of grass require diverse levels of maintenance, produce different levels of quality, and perform well under various climate, soil, and shade conditions.

Kentucky bluegrass, which does well in sunny areas, is the most widely adapted and used lawn grass in Idaho, according to the University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System. However, bluegrass has high water requirements and is prone to heat and drought stress.

Newer types of tall grasses are becoming more disease resistant and have at least 30 percent lower water requirements. Most people won't be able to distinguish the difference in appearance.

If your home has unobstructed access to sunlight and is air conditioned, you may reduce your annual heating and cooling costs from 10-20 percent by properly selecting and locating trees and shrubs on your property. "Solar-friendly" trees provide good shade in the summer and obstruct the least amount of sunlight in the winter.

You can request a free brochure listing solar-friendly trees and planting guidelines by calling the Idaho Energy Hotline, 1-800-334-SAVE.

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